

Desert Island Dildos Transcripts

EPISODE 1: ANNE STAGG – QUEER HISTORY AND THE AIDS CRISIS

Quenby

Hello and welcome to Desert Island Dildos, your friendly local podcast all about sex and sexuality. I'm Quenby and today I am joined by the wonderful Anne Stagg. Anne, tell me a bit about yourself.

Anne

Hello. Anne Stagg, pronouns they/them. She/her sometimes, but mostly they/them. I am a, I'm an erotic author and a- I used to be a therapist. I'm disabled, I have lupus and was- about five years ago had to really re-imagine my entire professional life because I was unable to keep working. And so that is, I've always written and that was kind of how I came into writing erotica was my spouse said to me, writing porn makes you really happy. So why don't you do that right now to kind of help yourself, find your feet. And after I had to leave, I was working. Umm, I worked for the Veterans Administration here in the states- United States. And I also was a family therapist. So I was working a lot, and then went from working a lot to not doing anything. And that was really hard, so yeah. So here I am, I came out as trans non binary, about- a little over a year ago, that was something that I've known, you know, my whole life, but found the courage to found the language for it at 49. So that was a really, it was an incredible journey. But that's, you know, that is, that is me. I write many things and historical fiction, which is a weird kind of combination of stuff.

Quenby

I mean, historically, people have fucked, that's why, you know, we continue to have history

Anne

Exactly!

Quenby

So, maybe it's not a weird combination.

Anne

I don't think it is. One of the things that I really am, even I think about that, I'm working on this. I've been working on a project for about five years now, this perpetual novel, that is about how queer folk, like it's the main character is, is queer, and instead of the struggle being their queerness, we're approaching it from, you know. As a queer community, we have been around since people you know, and so- and we have thrived and lived in ... spaces that were- that weren't affirming, but we have found a way to thrive and I really wanted to do that. In, in a kind of a historical setting, allow a character to be queer and have a love interest and to have that sense of community, but show it not from their queer struggle, but from their, you know, their, their living and thriving and becoming part of a community that they hadn't been before. So.

Quenby

Yeah, that sounds really fucking cool. And I want to read that book. Yeah, I mean, queer people have been around for. I mean, like, there's like plenty of examples of what we would call homosexual behaviour in the animal kingdom. So I'm gonna say homosexuality has been around for longer than humans have.

Anne

Yeah.

Quenby

So. And yeah, it's awesome seeing us not just reduced to "look how we suffer".

Anne

Yeah, exactly. You know, that the suffering is less about, like, one of the things I wanted to do was have this part of the part of the kind of crux of that story is this person's journey through grieving and the idea that the only way to like get through grieving is to walk through it, as opposed to around it or, you know, avoid it. And the idea that were you know, that we're not just these her, he's ripping stories of suffering and laws, that there is there is surviving and loving and thriving happening, even in non affirming spaces. And I think that's important to remember. It's a part of our history I don't think we see very often

Quenby

Because so much like queer history has been erased

Anne

Right, exactly

Quenby

Through like, specific targeted work to not record these stories or destroy records,

Anne

Or, or just, you know, historians, essentially, like you said, you know, just erasing the erasing relationships that were clearly queer like, yeah, you know. Alexander and Hephaestion, like, come on?

Quenby

Or, "Ah yes, this woman lived with her close female friend on a farm, where they raised chickens together, and collected shawls and knitted and wrote poetry. Sadly, neither of them ever found a husband."

Anne

Exactly. They lived together for 52 years as very close friends. There's so much history that we we don't have. I think it's finding the spaces where, where we have had, you know, where we have been recorded, where we have been seen, is really, it's just so important. And it's, you know, as I was going through the process of researching this particular book, one of the things that I did was because it takes place in 1876. So right at the end of the 19th century, was I went through the process of reading a lot of queer literature from that time period and finding these really lovely stories that were not just queer coded. Like, not just had that kind of encoding, they really go Yeah, I see that relationship for what the author intended, but that are just, like, straight out there. Stories of queer love that, you know, nobody talks about,

Quenby

And I think also, kind of have to look not just at traditional literature, or whatever, and look more like folk tales and those sort of stories. And I mean, just just looking at the class thing, like. Until pretty recently, like writing was very limited.

Anne

Yeah

Quenby

In terms of like, it was the domain of the church and well educated upper class people, basically. But queerness is based in people living their lives in a day to day thing. And so much of history is written by the people in power. So when you find those personal records, or things which bleed through in folklore, it's, it's just incredible, sort of seeing that divide between what was, you know, being written by the intelligensia of the time at versus what ordinary people were thinking. And I get the sense of like, of so- of so much having been forgotten and lost. And like, it's. I think it's I love talking about and thinking about queer history. And part of what I love about writing about it, is just the sense that you're reconstructing something. And like for, especially like historical fiction, I absolutely love work, which sort of it's quite freely like, 'we're going to use imagination to fill in the gaps, because we only get hints.' We only get like, moments of evidence, we don't get, you know, the epic love stories recorded in the literature from the time we get hints and suggestions. And we have to build from there and create these narratives.

Anne

Yeah, well, and I think that's why, especially for the queer community, historical fiction can be so incredibly powerful. Because we don't have a lot of, there aren't a lot of our stories that give the sense of what, what day to day life was for queer folks.

Quenby

And it's such a- because like, every generation, there seems to be an attempt to be like, "Oh, god, look at this trend of gayness. Oh, look at people making up a sexuality or look at non binary, it's this brand new thing." And it's- it's so- a lot of us when we come out or like when we're learning about this as kids, we're taught that this is some strange new phenomenon. So it's so powerful, is that connection to a past which is hidden.

Anne

You know, I grew up in the 70s and was really kind of coming into my queerness in the early 80s. And you know, even at then- You would have thought th queerness was just invented in 1969, in the Summer of Love, like, all of a sudden, there were all these queer people that didn't have- that weren't there before. And you know, there wasn't a lot of language, or at least I didn't hear a lot of language about being queer growing up in a really small town in the northeast. Like, I didn't have language for my queerness, I didn't have language for my transness until I was well into my 40s. Like that I understood my body in such a completely different way. And didn't under- like, didn't have words for what that was, like I had no idea non-binary was not a thing I had heard of when I was a kid. And so finding ways to give people a connection to a past is incredibly powerful, because it makes you not feel alone. Like you said, I think that so much of not just I mean, the dominant culture of queerness has been erased. But if that's the case, then the marginalised cultures, I mean, have just been completely wiped out. I think that's where historical fiction comes in and plays an incredible part in helping us connect, like you said to a past. That means that we're not alone. And there's a history behind us, where people have lived and loved each other. And then, you know, and, and been connected to their, their transness and their queerness. And in a really powerful way. And that we're- we didn't just kind of spring out of the woodwork every decade or so.

Quenby

Because we want attention

Anne

Right, when somebody decides there's a trans tipping point, or a queer tipping point, or you know, the new evangelical zeitgeist has their moment of looking at what's ruining the Modern Family, someone's always ruining the Modern Family. Curiously enough the modern family doesn't seem to exist the way they think it does anyway.

Quenby

Have you watched It's A Sin?

Anne

No, not yet. Not yet,

Quenby

There's a brilliant bit in it about- where they talk about section 28. Do you know about this?

Anne

Is that the you can't talk about ...

Quenby

It was illegal for teachers to talk- to promote homosexual lifestyles.

Anne

Okay, yeah

Quenby

Which could include just being openly gay

Anne

Right

Quenby

If a gay kid comes up to you, and is like, "I'm being bullied for being gay." You weren't allowed to do anything. Because if you condemned homophobic bullying that will could be perceived as promoting homosexuality. And like, the thing is, like the rhetoric around trans people in the UK now, it's the exact same thing.

Anne

Yes

Quenby

It's, it's the exact same language for concept for trans people or predators who are out to trick children into being trans. It's exactly the same. And it's, it's something which is like, so important, because like, this is, I mean, the history of the AIDS crisis is certainly within your lifetime. Like, I was born 96 so I-

Anne

Ok

Quenby

I was like, born into basically the end of it. Yeah. But like, so many people my age just have no idea about-

Anne

It was terrifying!

Quenby

About what it was like and like, the- also the neglect by the US government and the UK Government around it. It's just like incredible how few people know queer history because it's just not taught.

Anne

So I was- in 1980, I was 18 or just turned 18. So the beginning of the AIDS crisis in the early 80s up through kind of mid 80s. Queer was ... you know, especially for for gay men. It was like a death sentence. Essentially, there was no talk of you know, obviously we didn't have the science there to know, undetectable is untransmittable. But at the same time, there was like there was no push to understand this disease at all, at all. It was purely a gay disease and people were that's what they that's how the Reagan administration. Yeah. That's how the Reagan administration and the- you know, and the administration in the UK talked about it. And so we lost- in terms of talking about erasing history, we lost an entire generation of people, an entire generation of people of our connection to our past was just wiped out. And it was, there wasn't a single person I knew, who didn't know someone who was HIV positive, who didn't know someone who had died of AIDS. That was just the accepted reality.

Quenby

And people talk about it as you know the the gay disease, or like in that era. What ... what I think that doesn't show is but how specific a section of the gay community it was hitting. It was so concentrated in a few communities. And by their nature, they were often like the activist communities, the ones that were pushing for civil rights and just absolutely devastated and-

Anne

Right

Quenby

When you when you read stuff, like accounts written about it, it's such a sense of the visceral fear of like, one day, you might notice, like a splotch on your skin. Yeah. And, like countless friends before you were just like, that's it, that's ...

Anne

You're done. Yeah. That's it. And, and it is, I think, you know, it's interesting, that you- to frame it that way that so many of the concentration of, of transmission was, and it was among folks who were like, again, we lost an entire generation of activists just gone. Gone. And artists and creators, and, and the sense of- the sense of hopelessness was just, I mean, it was palpable. Like, now, it's not a death sentence. I mean, back when I was 18, get HIV, you're gonna die. That was it.

Quenby

And like, it's- in any, like public conversation about HIV, that is something like, you always need to push because like, the science has definitely moved a lot faster than the cultural narrative. So like, the cultural narrative is still quite often set in, you know, the 80s and 90s. And like "this is a terrible disease, it will kill you." It's like, if you have access to health care, which is a big, a big question, but like, if you have access to good health care, then it's very manageable, it's you know, you take pills, and provided they work for you like, it essentially shouldn't affect your life.

Anne

Absolutely. Well, and I think that that- I mean, that definitely- it elevates the- because so much of the narrative, the cultural narrative hasn't kept pace with the science. You know, there is also this, I think, for marginalised communities, especially this sense that ... it feeds the challenges of getting good- of getting adequate health care, not just good health care, but adequate basic level health care, in the States at least, is. Is so difficult, that it perpetuates that kind of the the white ruling class, dominant culture narrative, that people who contract- who get HIV are careless or don't take care of themselves, or all the disgusting myths that surround it. And a lot of it has to, I mean, the challenges that what's feeding that- their perception is the- is all things that are being kind of pushed by the dominant class like lack of access to health care, lack of access to a living wage, so you can afford the medication. The cost of

medication that big pharma has, you know, they make PREP, so friggin expensive, that it's almost impossible to get if you don't have insurance.

Quenby

I mean on- in the UK it's currently- you can just get prescribed it on the NHS which means it's like a standardised fee of like nine pounds per prescription filled. So, like you can go in and get a month's supply for £9, which like, it's. I think the prescription fee shouldn't really exist but like, compared to the US system, it's just completely different worlds. For as long as we have the NHS. So for the next few years it's great.

Anne

Ahaha it's great, yay

Quenby

Thank you so much for chatting with me. Before you go, I'm going to ask you the question I ask every guest.

Anne

Uh huh.

Quenby

If you were stuck on a very specifically supplied desert island, so you've got access to electricity.

Anne

Okay, good.

Quenby

To run your sex toy. You have lube and condoms there. You have something to get sand off of your lube and condoms. What sex toy would you like to be stuck on a desert island with and why?

Anne

I have been thinking about this non stop since we decided to sit down and chat. I would want to be stuck in a desert island with the Kali rabbit vibrator from Bellesa. And why? Because it is- it's an- it's got incredible G spot- it's- it's curved and kind of wider, has a wider bulb at the top. Which I really enjoy because it It definitely like the- it's got a very powerful vibration. And it kind of hits my G spot I guess at least exactly the way I would want it to, to hit that. And also because I have found that the way that it is designed, has- allows me to feel when I am experiencing dysphoria when I am feeling that loss, that kind of dysphoria of not having the sense of having a piece of my body that I know should be there. The way that the Kali is designed there. I can hold the- the- the outside part of it like- like a cock.

Quenby

Gender euphoria and arousal is such a good combination.

Anne

It gives me that feeling of- it gives me that feeling of completion that I don't think any other sex toy that I have does. And so I can feel the sense of, of holding myself. And that sense of arousal at the same time. And that is- that was one of the most remarkable discoveries I made about my body in the past year. So that would be why I would want that one with me on a desert island.

Quenby

That's a really fucking good answer.

Anne

Thank you. And I'm so glad this island has electricity because I was really concerned that it didn't.

Quenby

Thank you so much for joining me. I'm Quenby. You can find me @quenbycreatives on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, or @DIDildos on Twitter. Anne, where can people find you?

Anne

Hello, you can find me on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook, sort of on Facebook. I have a weird relationship with Facebook, they don't like me on Facebook so I often get deplatformed. So, but @annestaggwrites on Instagram and Twitter and you can find me at annestaggwrites.com. If you want to read more of my fiction or find out where you can purchase my- the- the anthology I'm in. The best bondage erotica anthology that just came out that I have a story in so yeah, you can find all that stuff on annestaggwrites.com.

Quenby

Thank you to everyone for listening and you can catch the next episode in a couple of weeks.

